

BALTIMORE SUN

5 March 1987

ARTICLE APPEARED
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Panel tipped off to Iran arms payoffs, Muskie says

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Tower commission had suspicions but no proof that Iranian officials received kickbacks from the sale of U.S. arms to Tehran, a possibility raised by a government consultant in 1985, former Secretary of State Edmund Muskie said yesterday.

Mr. Muskie, a member of the three-man Tower commission, said the panel stated no such conclusions because "you don't state (them) as facts until you can prove them, especially in a document supposed to be authoritative."

But he said someone in the arms industry — whom he did not identify — had told him about the payoffs, prompting his suspicions.

Officials investigating the weapons sale and the possible diversion of profits to the contra rebels in Nicaragua say at least \$20 million from the transactions cannot be found.

The commission's report on the Iran-contra affair, released last week, contained documents in which Michael Ledeen, a former

consultant to the National Security Council, told an unnamed CIA official about possible kickbacks.

After a meeting with Mr. Ledeen in December 1985, the chief of the CIA's Iran desk wrote, "Ledeen noted they had purposely overcharged the Iranians and had used around \$200,000 of these funds to support subject's political contacts inside Iran."

The word "subject" referred to Manucher Ghorbanifar, the Iranian middleman in the weapons sales during 1985 and 1986.

Clark McFadden, the Tower commission's chief counsel, said in an interview with *The San Francisco Examiner* that Mr. Ghorbanifar "had to grease the way somehow. That's what you would anticipate: that he used the money for other purposes in Iran."

A Senate Select Committee on Intelligence source told the *Examiner* that payoffs to Iranian officials totaled \$6 million, and the paper quoted an Iranian journalist in London,

Ali Reza Norizadeh, as saying money went to Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the speaker of the Iranian Parliament.

On Jan. 27, a man calling himself Mehdi Bahremani Rafsanjani and purporting to be the 25-year-old son of Mr. Rafsanjani said he planned to return to the United States \$5.8 million of the \$6 million he said he made from secret arms sales.

The man's statements, made at a press conference in a hotel in Santa Monica, Calif., could not be independently confirmed, and the State Department said yesterday that it knew nothing of any such offer. The younger Rafsanjani reportedly disappeared from Brussels, Belgium, in late December and was headed for Canada.

M. Ghahremani, a spokesman for the Iranian Embassy in Ottawa, Canada, said he knew nothing of young Rafsanjani's whereabouts. He also denied that the parliamentary speaker received money. "That would be false," he said.

Possible kickbacks and payoffs were also discussed by Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, the NSC aide who was fired for his role in the Iran-contra affair, according to a memo he wrote on Jan. 15, 1986.

Referring to Israel's complaints that it had not received enough money for its shipments of TOW missiles to Iran, Colonel North said he did not know "whether this is because Schwimmer pocketed the rest or whether there was a kickback" to Iranian officials in Tehran.

Al Schwimmer, an Israeli arms dealer and a friend of former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, handled logistical arrangements for weapons shipments to Iran from existing stockpiles in Israel in August and September of 1985.

Mr. Schwimmer, Mr. Ledeen, Mr. Ghorbanifar and Israeli arms merchant Yaacov Nimrodi frequently contacted one another in the initial phases of the arms deals.